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## **Is an off-the-track Thoroughbred right for you?**

*By the LongRun Thoroughbred Retirement Society*

The Thoroughbred is one of the most beautiful, athletic and versatile breeds of horses and has been used to improve many other breeds. Thoroughbreds have historically excelled at a variety of disciplines, including Hunting, Jumping, Endurance, Three-Day Eventing, Dressage, Barrel Racing and much more. With patience and knowledgeable handling, Thoroughbreds can make the most gentle and loving equine companion anyone could wish for.

Thoroughbreds are raised like any other breed of horse and enjoy turnout in groups in their early years and during the off-season. However, while at the track, they are used to a structured routine and considerable human interaction. They are sheltered, pampered and enjoy daily grooming and diets individually tailored to their needs. It's not surprising that many race horses, upon completion of their career at the track, don't flourish when they are turned out without thought of how best to transition them into their new way of life. Race horses are exposed to many different experiences, but there are some methods of handling horses that are common within the equestrian community that can prove to be unsettling to Thoroughbreds fresh off the track. Thoroughbreds are used to being tied to a wall while being groomed and are generally not familiar with cross-ties. They are also not used to be mounted from a mounting block. Shipping back and forth to the track is generally accomplished with a commercial van or large trailer, so initially getting a race horse into a two-horse or step-up may require a lot of patience and encouragement.

There is an old adage that is very true in the horse world – no hoof, no horse! You must have an experienced farrier to keep your horse on a regular six to eight-week trim or reset schedule. When racing, Thoroughbreds wear shoes for their own safety and protection, as well as for that of the jockeys. If you are an occasional rider or adopting a companion, going barefoot might be appropriate for your new Thoroughbred, but it's essential to keep a regular trimming schedule. The best thing you can do if you question what step to take with your new horse is to consult a veterinarian and farrier to best decide on a course of action. This ensures consistency in all aspects of your horses care.

When in full race training, Thoroughbreds are fed a very high calorie diet, comprised primarily of textured feeds or grain. This allows them to ingest a high number of calories in the smallest possible packaging. When transitioning your horse from this type of diet to a more forage based diet (i.e. hay, grass etc.), a changeover period of a few weeks is essential to wean them from their familiar diets.

Race horses expect a morning and evening feed of grain and can take a while to adjust to a free-choice hay diet, so plan for this period. Remember, the high caloric intake race horses ingest when in full work is the equivalent of an average human eating the calories required by an Olympic athlete in training. It is important to remember this as you transition your horse to its new life!



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Another small but important thing to remember when considering any new horse is that you should always have a full pre-purchase exam conducted. This ensures that you can provide the absolute best care to any horse you chose.

Once you have weighed your options, if you still think an off-the-track Thoroughbred is right for you, it is time to adopt or purchase your new equine partner and bring them home!

### **About the LongRun Thoroughbred Retirement Society**

Through fundraising and volunteer work, as well as assistance from the Ontario thoroughbred industry, LongRun evaluates retired race horses, provides any needed care and fostering they require, and works to place them in permanent, loving homes. LongRun has a number of experienced volunteers, staff and board members to assist you with the planning and preparation to bring your new horse home to your own property or a boarding facility. Anyone interested in offering a deserving horse a home is encouraged to contact LongRun to discuss available horses, future goals, and how they can work with you to find the right horse to suit your needs. Even if you just have a few questions about your own Thoroughbred, LongRun is happy to offer guidance and years of knowledge to steer you in the right direction!